

Supreme refuge that leads to Liberation For Real Happiness

Bahuṃ ve saraṇaṃ yanti pabbatāni vanāni ca;

Ārāma-rukkha-cet-yāni manussā bhayatajjitā. (Dhammapada-Buddha Vagga, 10 gatha)

Men driven by fear go to many a refuge, to mountains, forests, sacred trees, and shrines.

Netam kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ netam saraṇamuttamaṃ;

Netam saraṇamāgamma sabbadukkhā pamuccati. (11 gatha)

Such, indeed, is no safe refuge; such is not the refuge supreme. Not by resorting to such a refuge is one released from all suffering.

Yo ca buddhañca dhammañca saṅghañca saraṇaṃ gato;

Cattāri ariyasaccāni sammappaññāya passati.

Dukkhaṃ duk-kha-sa-muppādaṃ dukkhassa ca atikkamaṃ;

Ariyaṃ caṭṭhaṅgikaṃ maggaṃ duk-khū-pasa-ma-gā-minaṃ. (12-13 gatha)

He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Sublime Teaching and his Noble Order, penetrates with transcendental wisdom the Four Noble Truths—suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Etaṃ kho saraṇaṃ khemaṃ etaṃ saraṇamuttamaṃ;

Etaṃ saraṇamāgamma sabbadukkhā pamuccati. (11 gatha)

This indeed is the safe refuge, this is the refuge supreme. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering.

Above five stanzas which come in the Dhammapada in Khuddaka Nikaya point out the supreme refuge for the liberation. Devotion in the triple gem, understanding the four noble truths and practicing the eightfold path are described within those stanzas. First of all, we have to be confident what the Buddha said and then we have to understand how suffering arises. With this understanding arising and ceasing of suffering, we have to follow the path that leads to get rid of suffering, the eightfold path.

People in the world do everything in the name of happiness from birth to death. Sometimes they do visible things and sometimes they do miracle things to achieve this goal. Although they do a lot of things to achieve happiness getting rid of suffering, unfortunately, more suffering has finally developed in their lives. That is why at the end of life most of people die with unsatisfactoriness. In this situation, with his own understanding and experience the Buddha has explained the real path how to overcome suffering for the final bliss of liberation.

The very first thing that we have to develop on the path of liberation is confidence in the Buddha, his sublime teachings and his noble disciples. As much as we can listen to what the Buddha taught, our confidence in the triple gem gradually increases.

If someone hopes to go on the path of purification with practicing Buddha's message, he or she should develop the quality of faith, belief or confidence gradually. Confidence is the first step in every religion. The difference of Buddhism is it never says 'come and believe', it says 'come and see'. The confidence increases according to our knowledge and understanding in Buddhism. That is why the Buddha said, one who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma (*Yo dhammam passati so mam passati, yo mam passati so dhammam passati*).

At the very beginning of the path of liberation, confidence can arise by seeing or hearing something in Buddhist tradition. Further, it increases by listening to the Buddha's real message (which relates to understand the Karmic law and the Dependent Origination) and associating with the Buddha's noble disciples. We can go forward with confidence in what the Buddha said reflecting on our body, mind and the world. Generally, we can explain confidence as the faith in the Triple Gem i.e., the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. More exposure to the noble qualities of The Supreme Buddha, His teachings (Dhamma) and His noble disciples (Sangha) along with motivation and positive attitude can be called confidence in Buddhism. Especially, the confidence of Buddha's Enlightenment is the key to cultivate all the qualities of Enlightenment.

The disciple of the Noble One is endowed with verified faith, confidence and conviction in the Awakened Buddha as follows; Worthy (*Araham*), honorable and perfectly enlightened (*Samma Sambuddho*) is the Buddha! Fully consummate in knowledge and behavior (*Vijjaccaranasampanno*), totally transcended, expert in all the phases and dimensions (*Sugato*), knower of all worlds (*Lokavidu*), unsurpassable trainer of those who can be tamed (*Anuttaro purisadammasarathi*), both teacher and guide of deities and humans (*Sattha Devamanussanam*), awakened and enlightened (*Buddho*) blessed and exalted (*Bhagava*), is the Buddha. With the understanding and confidence of the Buddha's Enlightenment, the disciple is endowed with verified faith, confidence and conviction in the Dhamma as follows; Perfectly formulated is this Buddha-Dhamma (*Svakkhato*), visible right here and now (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective, timeless (*Akaliko*), inviting each and every one to come and see for themselves (*Ehipassiko*), inspect, examine and verify leading each and every one through progress towards complete perfection (*Opanaiko*), directly observable, experientable and realizable by each intelligence (*Paccattam veditabbo vinnuhi*). With the confidence on the Buddha and the Dhamma, the disciple becomes clever with verified faith, confidence and conviction in the Noble Sangha as follows; perfectly trained is this noble Sangha community of the Buddha's Noble disciples (*Supatipanno*): Trained in the right way (*Ujupatipanno*), the true way (*Nayapatipanno*), the good way (*Samicipatipanno*), the direct way Therefore these 8 kinds of individuals, these four noble pairs, deserve both gifts, grants, sacrifice, offerings, hospitality (*Ahuneyyo Pahuneyyo Dakkhineyyo*) and reverential salutation with joined palms (*Anjalikaraniyo*), since this noble Sangha community of the Buddha, is an unsurpassable and forever an unsurpassed field of merit for this world (*Anuttaram punnakkhettam lokassa*), to honor, respect, support, offer and protect.

This confidence is not a blind faith. It depends on the understanding of Buddha's message. Buddhism explains confidence as a great wealth (*Saddha dhanam*). If we are rich in material wealth, we are rich in happiness. However, that happiness can be changed instantly because it is material, but the wealth (treasure) of confidence is not like that. It doesn't change when material richness changes. *Saddha* will not die along with the physical body. If we have strong confidence on the Buddha, his teachings and his noble disciples, our mind always is full with satisfactoriness and happiness. Then negative thoughts such as anger, greed, ignorance and jealousy will have no place in our mind. And positive thoughts such as loving kindness, compassion, generosity and wisdom will also be gradually developed in our mind.

The Buddha says the understanding of suffering causes to increase the confidence. If someone has the knowledge about arising of suffering as per the Buddhist perspective, his confidence will gradually increase. At the very beginning, he understands that when we do some unwholesome deeds with wicked mind in our life, we will have the bad results (disadvantages) not only here after but in this life itself as well. So too we will be the good results of good deeds. If a person has this knowledge, that person doesn't like to suffer anymore, as he is intelligent. That is why he motivates himself to get rid of evils and cultivate good in his life, as soon as he can. This is the nature of the confidence in the Dhamma. Therefore, Buddhism says that all good qualities which are wholesome depend on confidence (*Saddha mulika sabbepi kusala dhamma*).

Saddha is one of the main spiritual faculties. When we practice confidence towards the Triple Gem, other spiritual qualities will also develop within us. As much as we have confidence in the Triple Gem, it is able to develop four other spiritual qualities i.e., energy (*Viriya*), mindfulness or awareness (*Sati*), concentration or tranquility (*Samadhi*) and wisdom (*Panna*) for the success of our life.

Furthermore, if we have knowledge about suffering as the Buddha mentioned, our faith in Buddha improves. Especially, when we see the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates, we can see the way to get rid of suffering. The five aggregates are forms (*Rupa*), feelings (*Vedana*), perception (*Sanna*), mental formations (*Sankhara*), consciousness (*vinnana*). The experience that we receive through six senses arises and ceases according to conditions at the moment. When we have an experience through a sense such as eye, nose, it means five aggregates arise. Not only they arise but suddenly they cease. The nature of five aggregates is **'Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුත්ථා සම්භවං භුත්ථා න භවිස්සති).

With the confidence in the triple gem, we understand how suffering arises. Suffering arises because of ignorance. After experience that we get through our senses, if we think still that experience is happening that is the main cause of suffering. That is why the Buddha said briefly the

five aggregates are suffering (*Sankhitthena panchupadankkhanda dukkha*). If we are mindful to reflect on that after experience ceases, we are able to overcome ignorance, delusion. Then we can overcome lustful desire (*Lobha*) which is the cause of suffering. As much as lustful desire or greed is overcome, simultaneously anger also has been overcome. When we are able to get rid of desire, anger and ignorance, it causes to get rid of suffering.

For the path of final bliss of liberation, Buddhism has recommended to practice the threefold discipline. It describes with details as the eightfold path. For the real happiness and getting rid of suffering this is the only path.

1. Right Understanding (*Sammà ditti*)

The main cause of suffering is ignorance or delusion (*Avijja*). If we like to overcome suffering or unsatisfactoriness, we have to reduce ignorance. Right understanding is the opposite of ignorance. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message and reflect on it, we can develop right understanding. This understanding causes us to go on the path getting rid of suffering towards the final goal.

When we practice the path that leads to purify our mind, we should have correct knowledge about the world and ourselves. As it is mentioned before, the first step of right understanding is the confidence of karmic law. It means when we do good deeds with pure mind, we will have the good results and when we do bad deeds with wicked mind, we will have the bad results because of polluted mind. The second step of right understanding is the understanding of dependent origination. It means understanding of impermanence. That is; when conditions are together, the experience arises and when the conditions cease, the experience also ceases. According to this view, the impermanence which is taught in Buddhism is the understanding of arising and ceasing of our experience through our senses. If someone has this understanding, he puts an earnest to purify his mind from negative thoughts because he doesn't like to suffer any more. He continues to the second step.

2. Right Thoughts (*Sammà samkappa*)

According to right understanding, further we are not ready to suffer. That is why we are going to purify our mind from unwholesome or negative thoughts such as desire and hatred. We are always sensitive and watchful when the thoughts come to our mind whether they are good or bad. Here, we know very well that when negative thoughts such as anger, desire, jealousy, etc. come to our mind, we suffer or worry. And when positive thoughts such as kindness, friendliness, compassion, generosity, etc. come to our mind, our mind is pure, calm, quiet, peaceful and happy. That is why we always try to live with right thoughts because of right understanding.

3. Right Speech (*Sammà vācā*)

Then he goes towards the path. Now he is ready to control his speech too. When he tells something, he reflects on it again and again whether it is correct or not. Here he avoids false, backbiting, rash and rubbish words for the sake of happiness. He practices the discipline in speech. He always protects the consistency of speech in all his life.

4. Right Action (*Sammà kammanta*)

He has not only verbal discipline but he has behavioral discipline as well. Here he abstains from stealing, killing others and having sexual misconduct. Because of right understanding, he knows very well, when he has those bad actions, he has to face the inevitable consequences and knows how it leads to more suffering in the long-run. That is why he gets rid of those activities. He wishes the pleasant, calm happy life.

5. Right Livelihood (*Sammà ājiva*)

Further he goes on the path of satisfactoriness. He engages in right livelihood and always attempts to do righteous jobs leaving wrong jobs such as killing animals, selling drugs and poisons. As the result of these good activities his happiness gradually increases. Because of right understanding, he practices his correct knowledge for all his activities. He never forgets his spiritual goals even though he lives in complex and difficult situations, because he always lives in the righteous way with right understanding.

6. Right Effort (*Sammà vāyāmā*)

And his courage develops to do good and to get rid of bad. Especially, here we make sure not to give rise to bad deeds that are not yet arisen in us, and try to give up bad things that already we do. Further, we try to initiate good things that we haven't started yet and try to keep developing good that we are already doing. It means we are on the way to happiness.

7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammà sati*)

Here he does all his activities with mindfulness. He knows very well that when he loses his mindfulness, he loses his happiness. Therefore he always does everything mindfully and reflects on his feelings, mind and mental formations with awareness. Mindfulness in Buddhism is a major quality that we have to practice. And it is the center of all kinds of spiritual factors. All kinds of doctrines in Buddhism can be included into mindfulness.

Mindfulness is divided into four as;

- The contemplation of body (*Kayanupassana*)
- The contemplation of feeling (*Vedananupassana*)
- The contemplation of mind (*Cittanupassana*)
- The contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammanupassana*)

8. Right Tranquility (*Sammā samādhi*)

Furthermore, practicing his mind by meditation, he always tries to keep his mind away from defilements such as desire, anger and delusion. Here, he is clever to keep his mind for a long time with wholesome thoughts. His mind is pure, calm and quite like clear water in a well.

With this concentrated mind he reflects on the impermanence, suffering and egolessness (or selflessness) again and again. The understanding of three characteristics of existence grows up every moment when we are on the path to purification. As the result of practicing this correct path, gradually he reaches the ultimate liberation of the mind. And he reaches other two steps too which are 'the right knowledge of suffering' (*Samma Nana*) and 'the right liberation of suffering (*Samma Vimukti*).' When we are on this path, we can see the results in our life that we are growing up with honesty, loving kindness and wisdom.

If we are on the real path of purification, day by day, moment by moment we are going forward on this eight fold path. It means, avoiding suffering we are reaching to liberation and happiness.

The Buddha explains that this is the direct path, this is the noble path, and this is the real path to cease from suffering, sorrow, sickness, death, old age and lamentation. If we are intelligent, honest, kind for beings and have faith in the Buddha's enlightenment, we can go along this path. Simultaneously, our wisdom grows up with the understanding of impermanence. As the result of seeing impermanence, as soon as we have an experience through our senses we know very well this experience arises at the moment and it ceases at that moment without remaining anything. If we are clever to see this world reality again and again, we are gradually reaching the liberation getting rid of suffering. This is the real success that we should achieve in our life as intelligent and fortunate people in this rare life while the Buddha's dispensation is still alive in the world.

May The Triple Gem Bless You!

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May All Beings Be Well, Happy & Peaceful!

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